News, Notes, Comments

Longevity Record for the Snow Bunting

The oldest Snow Bunting *(Plectrophenax nivalis)* reported from North American bandings was estimated to be at least 8 years and 9 months old. It was banded as a male of unknown age at Izembeck National Wildlife Refuge, Cold Bay, Alaska, on 27 Dec 1970 and recaptured at the same place on 19 Mar 1979 (Klimkiewicz and Futcher 1987, Klimkiewicz 2000). Previously, Bryens (1944) reported several returns of Snow Buntings to a wintering area in Michigan, including one that was at least 8 years and 8 months old. The oldest banded Snow Bunting reported in Europe was 4 years and 1 month old in Scotland (Cramp and Perrins 1994).

Here we report a banded Snow Bunting that was estimated to be at least 9 years and 7 months old.

Snow Buntings have been captured in baited funnel traps at Innis Point Bird Observatory, near Ottawa, Ontario (45°23'N, 75°54'W), during winters since 1985. Traps were set on the ground or on the flat roof of a building.

On 1 Feb 1992, a Snow Bunting was captured and banded with band number 1431-61952 by WFP. It was aged ASY (after second year) and sexed as a male by its plumage (Pyle et al. 1987, Svensson 1984). Its wing chord measured 108 mm.

Snow Bunting #1431-61952 was not seen again until it was recaptured by DJTH and WFP, at the same place, on 16 Jan 2000. On that day it was again aged ASY and sexed as a male. It weighed 37.5 g and its wing chord measured 109 mm.

Following the arbitrary assumption of Klimkiewicz and Futcher (1987), #1431-61952 was hatched on or before 1 Jun 1990 and, therefore, it was at least 9 years and 7 months old in Jan 2000. Encounters of banded birds indicate that Snow Buntings that winter in Ontario breed in southwest Greenland and probably in the eastern Canadian Arctic (Brewer et al. 2000). In those regions, egg laying rarely commences before 1 Jun and most hatching is in July (Asbirk and Franzman 1978, Fox 1981, Hussell 1972, Lyon and Montgomerie 1995), so the true age of this bird was probably about 9 years and 6 months.

Bryens (1944) said that he thought that his oldest Snow Bunting (reported above as at least 8 years 8 months old) was in its 10th winter "judging from my studies of the plumage of this species," but he provided no details. If so, that bird would have been 9 years and 8 months old, following the convention of Klimkiewicz and Futcher (1987).

Another Snow Bunting, banded at Innis Point on 29 Feb1992, was also recaptured there by DJTH and WJP on 16 Jan 2000. It was originally banded with #1431-61985 as SY (second year) and unknown sex by William J. Murphy and was recaptured subsequently by WFP on 18 Jan 1998. It was aged ASY and sexed as a male at both recaptures. In Jan 2000 its conventional age was at least 8 years and 7 months. At that time band #1431-61985 was considerably worn, noticeably more so than #1431-61952 despite their similar ages, and we replaced it with #1461-27898.

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A New Longevity Record for the Magnolia Warbler

A Magnolia Warbler *(Dendroica magnolia)* banded on 13 Jul 1993 and recaptured on 11 Jun 2000 provides a longevity record for the species of 8 years and 0 months. The bird was a female, but when recaptured in 2000, its plumage was more typical of that associated with males.

The bird was banded originally by Mark Dugdale with USFWS band number 1890-65086 on the left leg and a supplementary address band (Hussell et al. 1993) on the right leg at a MAPS (Monitoring Avian Productivity and Survivorship; see De Sante et al. 2000) site operated by the Thunder Cape Bird Observatory at Thunder Cape, Ontario (41°18'N, 88°56'W). At this time the bird was sexed as a female due to the presence of a heavily vascularized brood patch and typical female plumage. It was aged as a second year (SY), based on plumage. Flight feather wear was labeled heavy, indicative of an adult prior to its prebasic molt (Pyle 1997:465). With a well-developed brood patch this could not have been a hatch year bird.

I recaptured #1890-65086 at the same site on 11 Jun 2000, the first recorded recapture of this bird since its original banding. Based on plumage alone, I aged it in the field as after hatch year (AHY), due to mixed SY and ASY feathers. The rectrices were truncate, there were no molt limits among the wing coverts, and flight feather wear was light–all indicative of an ASY bird. By contrast, the primary coverts were tapered and abraded with no blue edging, features usually associated with the retained juvenile feathers of a SY bird (Pyle 1997:465). The bird was sexed as a female based on the presence of a vascularized brood patch (Fig. 1).

Fig. 1. Underside of Magnolia Warbler #1890-65086 showing a vascularized brood patch and bold streaking of the underparts, 11 Jun 2000. (Photograph by Bruce Rodrigues)